

The Future in John (Life Eschatologized)

Author: Dr. David Turner | Session 22

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Abstract

This lecture by Dr. David Turner explores the eschatological framework of the Johannine corpus, arguing that John emphasizes the present realization of future realities, a concept termed 'Life Eschatologized' or inaugurated eschatology. Rather than focusing on apocalyptic predictions of a distant future, the Johannine writings present eternal life, resurrection, and judgment as already active in the believer's life while maintaining their future physical fulfillment. Turner traces these dynamics through four key theological themes: the coming yet present hour, the kingdom of God, the coming of Jesus, and the renewal of creation. The study highlights that the decisive victory has already been won by Christ, rendering the future consummation a natural unfolding of His finished work.

Outline

I. Introduction to Johannine Eschatology

A. Context of the Lecture within the Series

1. Follows a chapter-by-chapter study of the Gospel of John spanning twenty videos.
2. Connects with the previous lecture on John 1 and Genesis 1, focusing on protology (creation and renewal).
3. Serves as the final lecture, exploring John's unique portrayal of the future: "Life Eschatologized."

B. Defining Eschatology: Traditional vs. Johannine Emphasis

1. Traditional association: Apocalyptic images of future events (e.g., Albrecht Dürer's 'Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse' from Revelation 6).
2. Johannine distinctive: Focus on the eschatologizing of the present rather than projecting a qualitatively different future.
3. Thematic core: Explaining what is in light of what will be; the future has already begun, and believers are already raised to eternal life (John 5:24-29).

II. Historical and Literary Assumptions of the Johannine Corpus

A. The Question of Authorship

1. Anonymity of texts: Neither the Gospel, the Epistles, nor the Apocalypse specify the Apostle John or the beloved disciple as author.
2. Conservative scholarship view: A strong case exists that the Apostle John wrote all five works or was the primary source of their traditions.
3. Prioritizing theological continuity: Thematic correlation and conceptual consistency are more critical to this study than historical debates over authorship.

B. Literary Development and Relationships

1. Setting relationships: Possibility of Gospel composition establishing the context for the letters and Apocalypse, or vice versa.
2. Theological progression: The Apocalypse represents a later stage of Johannine teaching, applying the Gospel's narrative of Jesus' victory to concrete situations in the letters.
3. Luke Timothy Johnson's packet hypothesis (The Writings of the New Testament):
 - a. Suggests the letters were sent together as a packet carried by Demetrius to a single community.
 - b. Third John: Commends Gaius' fidelity, exposes Diocletian's opposition, and endorses Demetrius.
 - c. Second John: Serves as a cover letter or introduction to the church.
 - d. First John: A homiletic exhortation to maintain faithfulness to the elders' traditions as expressed in the Gospel.

III. The Theological Spectrum: Realized vs. Futuristic Eschatology

A. The 'Already' — Realized Aspects of Johannine Eschatology

1. Messianic presence: Jesus has already come to reveal God and establish authentic worship (John 1:14-18, 4:21-26; 1 John 4:2, 5:6).
2. Finished redemption: Jesus has already overcome the world and finished His work (John 16:33, 17:4, 19:30; 1 John 2:8, 3:5; Rev 1:5, 3:21, 5:5).
3. Believers' victory: Followers of Jesus have already overcome the evil one (1 John 2:13-14, 4:4, 5:4-5; Rev 12:10-11).
4. Present resurrection: The hour of resurrection is already here; the spiritually dead are hearing Christ's voice and coming to life (John 5:25-29).
5. Judgment of Satan: The prince of this world has already been judged and cast out (John 12:31, 16:11; 1 John 3:8; Rev 12:7-10).
6. Possession of life and condemnation: Believers already possess eternal life; unbelievers are already under active judgment (John 3:18, 3:36; 1 John 5:12-13, 5:19).
7. Antichrists: Opponents of Christ are already active in the world (1 John 2:18, 2:22, 4:3; 2 John 7).

B. The 'Not Yet' — Futuristic Aspects of Johannine Eschatology

1. Preparation and return: Jesus promises to prepare a place and return to take His disciples to be with Him (John 14:1-6, 21:22-23; 1 John 2:28, 3:2-3; Rev 1:7, 22:20).
2. Temporary trials vs. final victory: Enemies are temporarily permitted to overcome God's people, but Christ will ultimately conquer all adversaries (Rev 6:2, 17:14).
3. Physical resurrection: A future hour is coming when all in the tombs will be physically raised for reward or condemnation (John 5:28-29; Rev 20:11-15).
4. Future Antichrist and Judgment: Active present antichrists signal the reality of the final Antichrist; believers anticipate Judgment Day with bold confidence (1 John 2:18, 4:17).

C. Scholarly Responses to the Tension

1. Purely Realized Eschatology:
 - a. C.H. Dodd: Postulated that the delay in Christ's return led early Christians to sublimate futuristic apocalypticism into a mystical sense of Christ's indwelling via the Spirit.
 - b. Rudolf Bultmann: Employed an existentialist, demythologizing agenda that rejected miracles and future apocalypses, viewing futuristic texts in John as later ecclesiastical interpolations.
 - c. Paul von Walde: Argued for three redactional stages developing from present possession of life to spiritual existence after death, and finally to physical resurrection.
2. Strictly Futuristic Eschatology (Dispensationalism):
 - a. Charles Ryrie: Downplayed Gospel and Epistles, focusing Johannine eschatology almost exclusively on the Apocalypse.
 - b. John Walvoord: Argued that expectations of Jesus' first advent went largely unfulfilled, denying any present realization of eschatological blessings.
 - c. Alva J. MacLean: Strictly separated the present hour of spiritual regeneration from the future hour of physical resurrection.
3. The Academic Consensus (Inaugurated Eschatology):
 - a. Rejects all-or-nothing extremes, viewing realized and futuristic aspects as complementary and correlative, not contradictory.
 - b. Scholarly proponents: G.E. Ladd ('presence of the future'), Stephen Smalley (interrelationship of time and eternity), Rudolf Schnackenburg (present judgment does not deny future judgment), Craig Kester (rift in time transforming hopes), G.K. Beale (new creation renewal inaugurated in Christ), Thomas Schreiner, Moody Smith, Frank Thielman, and C.K. Barrett.
 - c. Term of choice: 'Inaugurated' or Joachim Jeremias' 'sich realisierende eschatologie' (eschatology in the process of realization).

IV. Selected Eschatological Themes in the Gospel of John

A. Theme 1: The Coming Yet Present Hour ('The Hour is Coming and Now Is')

1. Samaritan Woman (John 4:20-25): The hour has arrived where true worship is characterized by spirit and truth, transcending physical geography (Gerizim vs. Jerusalem). This represents a messianic renewal of worship, reaching all nations in fulfillment of Abrahamic promises.
2. Healing of the Paralytic (John 5:16-29): Jesus defends His Sabbath work by linking it to the Father's continuous activity. The hour is 'now is' as the spiritually dead are raised to life through His Word, which serves as a precursor and guarantee of the coming physical resurrection.
3. Raising of Lazarus (John 11:17-27): Martha's orthodox belief in the future resurrection on the last day is expanded by Jesus' claim that He is Himself the resurrection and the life. Belief in Him guarantees a relationship that death cannot terminate, demonstrated by Lazarus' resuscitation.

B. Theme 2: The Kingdom of God

1. Nicodemus (John 3:3-10): Jesus challenges nationalistic, geopolitical expectations of the Kingdom. Participation requires a supernatural, transformational spiritual rebirth.
2. Pilate (John 18:33-38): Jesus declares His Kingdom is 'not from this world,' indicating a heavenly origin and authority that transcends earthly structures and looks toward a future consummation.

C. Theme 3: The Coming of Jesus (Multi-faceted Comings)

1. Futuristic coming: Return of Christ as eschatological messianic king to take His followers to be with Him (John 14:1-6, 21:22-23).
2. Post-resurrection comings: Jesus' literal physical manifestations to His disciples (John 14:18-21, 16:16-24; chapters 20-21).
3. Proximate/Spiritual coming: The indwelling of the Father and Son through the Helper/Paraclete Spirit (John 14:15-17, 25-26, 15:26-27, 16:7-15). The Spirit equips the church to continue Jesus' ministry in the midst of trials.

D. Theme 4: The Renewal of Creation

1. The Prologue (John 1:1-18): Portrays the Logos as the original Creator who becomes the incarnate Renewer of creation. Employs light and darkness metaphors reminiscent of Genesis 1.
2. Implicit New Creation theology: Narratives utilize subtle Genesis echoes (seven days pattern in John 1:19ff, garden setting in John 20:15, and the breathing of the Spirit in John 20:22 echoing Genesis 2:7).
3. Epistles and Apocalypse: 1 John highlights the present encroachment of light over darkness. Revelation depicts Christ as the active agent of creation renewal (Rev 3:14, 4:11, 5:9-10), concluding with the ultimate descent of the New Jerusalem, the end of death, and the restoration of the tree of life (Rev 21-22).

V. Conclusion: Living the Life Eschatologized

A. The Integration of Present and Future

1. John does not de-eschatologize the future, but rather eschatologizes the present, urging immediate belief and active fellowship with God.
2. The moral decisions made in the present entirely determine one's place in the life to come.

B. Practical Characteristics of the Eschatological Life (John 10:10)

1. Abundant life: Produced by the Spirit through the life-giving Word of God (John 6:63-68).
2. Authentic worship: Continuous communion in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24).
3. Self-sacrificial love: Loving others in the same manner that Christ loves His followers (John 13:34-35).
4. Absolute obedience: Modeled after Jesus' perfect obedience to the Father's commands (John 15:10).
5. Trinitarian unity: Missional unity designed to lead the world to faith in Jesus (John 17:21-23).
6. Surviving life: Hope-filled assurance that transcends death and anticipates physical resurrection (John 5:28, 6:40).

C. The Finished Work of Christ

1. The foundational significance of Christ's past work on the cross makes the future consummation both secure and, in a sense, anticlimactic.
2. Future glories are the unfolding of the infinite value of what Jesus has already accomplished (as highlighted by Eichten).